

FOUR MASTERS OF ETCHING

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PREFACE

IT is well to say, in a word or two, what this short book aims at. Unavoidably inferior to Mr. Hamerton's in merit, it is voluntarily much more limited in scheme. Taking only the four artists who seem to me most worthy of note among the many good etchers of our day, it seeks to study their work with a degree of detail unnecessary and even impossible in a volume of wider scope. In trying to do this, it can hardly help affording, at least incidentally, some notion of what I hold to be the right principles of etching, nor can it wholly ignore the relation of etching to other art, or the relation of Art to Nature and Life. But these points are touched but briefly, and only by the way.

A book of larger aim, on Etching in England and France, might justifiably have given almost as much importance to Macbeth and Tissot here, and to Bracquemond there, as has been given in the annexed pages to Haden, Whistler, Jacquemart, and Legros. But Macbeth and Tissot belong to a younger generation than do any of my four masters. Much of what the art of etching could do in modern days was already in evidence before their work began. My four masters are four pioneers. Bracquemond may be a pioneer also; but in his original work, skilled and individual as that is, he has chosen to be very limited. The place he occupies is honourable, but it is small.

About the four chapters that here follow I need say very little. That on Seymour Haden has been passed through the *Art Journal*, that on Legros through the *Academy*, that on Jules Jacquemart through the *Nineteenth Century*. All have now been revised. Something of

the chapter on Whistler has also appeared in the *Nineteenth Century*, but in quite different form, and I will explain why. In the first place, since that article appeared, Mr. Whistler has given me cause to modify to some extent my estimate of his art. Having seen this cause, I have acted on it. I am not a Mede nor a Persian. And in a system of criticism which seeks to inquire and understand, rather than to denounce, there is place for change. Again, much of the article in the *Nineteenth Century* was occasioned not by Mr. Whistler's practice, but by the attack which he made upon a great teacher and critic, and, by implication, upon all critics who allow themselves that abstinence from technical labour which is often essential if their criticism is to be neither immature for want of time to spend on it nor prejudiced because of their exclusive association with some special ways or cliques in art. Whatever dealt with this business I have now withdrawn. It was written for a particular purpose, and its purpose was served.

A word now on a matter of detail. Two expressions in the body of this volume—"our *Dusty Millers*" (page [10](#)), and "*M. Rodin* here" (page [42](#))—which only the really careful reader will honour me by noticing, are due to the fact that after the body of the volume was finally printed, some change was made in the choice of the illustrations. For Mr. Haden's copper of *Dusty Millers*, I have been happy to be able to substitute *Grim Spain*, the only Spanish subject of his which I thoroughly like. And in place of M. Legros's learned but hardly attractive portrait of M. Rodin, it has been still more fortunate that it has been possible to procure the portrait of Mr. Watts, the painter, one of the most triumphant instances of Legros's art.

F. W.

London, 1883.

CHAPTER I.

SEYMOUR HADEN.

PERHAPS the two qualities which, as one gets a little *blasé* about the productions of Art, continue the most to stir and stimulate, and to quicken the sense of enjoyment, are the quality of vigour and the quality of exquisiteness. If an artist is so fortunate as to possess both these virtues in any fulness, he is sure not only to please a chosen public during several generations, but to please the individual student—if he be a capable student—at all times and in all moods, and, of the two, perhaps, that is really the severer test. But to have these qualities in any fulness, and in equal measure, is given to a man only here and there over the range of centuries. It is given to a Titian, it is given to a Rembrandt, and of course to a Turner; it is given in the days of the Grand Monarch to a Watteau, and in the days of the Second Empire to a Méryon. But so notable and rare a union is denied—is it not?—even to a Velasquez; while what we praise most in Moreau le Jeune is by no means a facility of vigour, and what is characteristic of David Cox is certainly no charm of exquisiteness. To unite the two qualities—I mean always, of course, in the fulness and equality first spoken of—demands not a rich temperament alone. The full display of either by itself demands that. It demands a temperament of quite exceptional variety: the presence, it sometimes seems, almost of two personalities—so unlike are the two phases of the gift which we call genius.

With the artists of energy and vigour I class Mr. Seymour Haden. Theirs is the race to which, indeed, quite obviously, he belongs. Alive, undoubtedly, to grace of form, fire and vehemence of expression are yet his dominant qualities. With him, as the artistic problem is first conceived, so must it be executed, and it must be executed immediately. His energy is not to be exhausted, but of patience there is a smaller stock. For him, as a rule, no second thought is the wisest; there is no fruitful revision, no going back to-day upon yesterday's effort; little of careful piecing and patching, to put slowly right what was wrong to begin with. He is the artist of the first impression. Probably it was just and justly conveyed; but if not, there the failure stands, such as it is, to be either remembered or forgotten, but hardly to be retrieved. Such as it is, it is done with, no more to be recalled than the player's last night's performance of Hamlet or Macbeth. Other things will be in the future: the player is looking forward to to-night; but last night—that is altogether in the past.

There is no understanding Seymour Haden's work, its virtues and deficiencies, unless this note of his temperament, this characteristic of his productions, is continually borne in mind. It is the secret of his especial delight in the art of etching; the secret of the particular uses to which he has so resolutely applied that art. With the admission of the characteristic, comes necessarily the admission of the limitation it suggests. Accustomed to labour and patience, not only in the preparation for the practice of an art, but in the actual practice of it, one may possibly be suspicious of the art which substantially demands that its work shall be done in a day if it is to be done at all. Such art, one says, forfeits, at all events, its claim to the rank that is accorded to the *œuvre de longue haleine*, when that is carried to a successful issue and not to an impotent conclusion.

To flicker bravely for an hour; to burn continuously at a white heat—they are very different matters. The mental powers which the two acts typify must be differently valued. And the art that asks, as one of its conditions, that it shall be swift, not only because swiftness is sometimes effective, but because the steadiness of sustained effort has a difficulty of its own—that art, to use an illustration from poetry and from music, takes up its place, voluntarily, with the lyrists, and with Schubert, as we knew him of old—foregoes voluntarily all comparison with the epic, and with Beethoven.

Well, this remark—a remonstrance we can hardly call it—has undoubtedly to be accepted. Only it must be laid to Mr. Seymour Haden's credit that he has shown a rare sagacity in the choice of his method of expression. The conditions of the art of etching—a special branch of the engraver's art, and not to be considered wholly alone—are fitted precisely to his temperament, and suit his means to perfection. Etching is qualified especially to give the fullest effect to the mental impression with the least possible expenditure of merely tedious work. Etching is for the vigorous sketch—and it is for the exquisite sketch likewise. It is for the work in which suggestion may be ample and unstinted, but in which realisation may, if the artist chooses, hardly be pursued at all. To say that, has become one of the commonplaces of criticism. We are not all of us so gifted, however, that commonplaces are to be dispensed with for the remainder of time.

Of the great bygone masters of the art, some have pursued it in Mr. Haden's way, and others have made it approach more nearly to the work of the deliberate engraver. Vandyke etched as a speedy and decisive sketcher; the later and elaborate work added to his plates was added by other hands, and produced only a monotonous

completeness destructive of the first charm, the charm of the vivid impression. Méryon, whose noble work Mr. Haden has rightly felt and pronounced to be “not impulsive and spontaneous, but reflective and constructive, slow and laborious,” used etching evidently in a different method and for different ends. With something of the patience of a deliberate line-engraver, he built up his work, piece by piece and stroke by stroke: touching here, and tinkering there—he says so himself—and the wonder of it is, that for all his slowness and delay, the work itself remains simple and broad, and the poetical motive is held fast to. This Mr. Haden has expressly recognised. Nothing eluded Méryon. The impressions that with some men come and go, he pertinaciously retained. Through all mechanical difficulties, his own quality of concentrativeness preserved to his work the quality of unity. Then, again, it must be said that the greatest etcher of old time, Rembrandt, and one of the greatest, Claude, employed the two methods, and found the art equal to the expression both of the first fancy and of the realised fact. To see which, one may compare the first state of Rembrandt’s *Clément de Jonghe*—with its rapid seizure of the features of a character of extraordinary subtlety—and the *Ephraim Bonus*, with its deliberate record of face and gesture, dress and environment; and in Claude the exquisite free sketching in the first state of *Shepherd and Shepherdess* with the quite final work of the second state of *Le Bouvieur*. Mr. Haden, then, has full justification for his view of etching; yet Mr. Haden’s view of etching is not the only one that can be held with fairness.

For all but forty years now Seymour Haden has been an etcher, so that we may naturally see in his work the characteristics of youth and those of an advanced maturity, in which, nevertheless, the eye is not dimmed nor the natural fire abated. That is to say, the mass

of his labour—over a hundred and eighty etchings—already affords the opportunity of comparison between subjects essayed with the careful and delicate timidity of a student of twenty, and subjects disposed of with the command and assurance that come of years, of experience, and—may I add?—of recognition. But in his early time Mr. Haden did but little on the copper, and then he would have had no reason to resent the title of “amateur,” now somewhat unreasonably bestowed on a workman who has given us the *Agamemnon*, the *Sunset on the Thames*, the *Sawley*, and the *Calais Pier*. Somewhere, perhaps, knocking about the world are the six little plates, chiefly of Roman subjects, which Mr. Haden painfully and delicately engraved in the years 1843 and 1844. All that remains of them, known to the curious in such matters, is a tiny group of impressions cherished in the upper chambers of a house in Hertford Street—a scanty barrier, indeed, between these first tentative efforts and oblivion.

But in 1858 and 1859 Mr. Haden began to etch seriously; he began to give up to the practice of this particular way of draughtsmanship a measure of time that permitted well-addressed efforts and serious accomplishments. Fine conceptions in all the Arts ask, as their most essential condition, some leisure of mind, some power of acquisition of the happy mood in which one sees the world best, and in which one can labour joyously at passing on the vision. The best Art may be produced with trouble, but it must be with the “joyful trouble” of Macduff. Nothing is more marked in the long array of Mr. Haden’s mature work than the sense of pleasure he has had in doing it. How much, generally, has it been the result of pleasant impressions! How much the most satisfactory and sufficient has it been when it has been the most spontaneous! Compare the absolute unity, the clearly apparent motive, of such

an etching as *Sunset on the Thames* with the more obscure aim and more limited achievement of the *Windsor*. The plates of the fruitful years 1859, 1860, 1863, 1864, and so onward, were done, it seems, under happy conditions.

Any one who turns over Seymour Haden's plates in chronological order, will find that though, as it chanced, a good many years had passed, yet very little work in etching had been done before the artist had found his own method and was wholly himself. There were first the six dainty little efforts of 1843 and 1844; then, when etching was resumed in 1858—or, rather, when it was for the first time taken to seriously—there were the plates of *Arthur*, *Dasha*, *A Lady Reading*, and *Amalfi*. In these he was finding his way; and then, with the first plates of the following year, his way was found; we have the *Mytton Hall*, the *Egham*, and the *Water Meadow*, perfectly vigorous, perfectly suggestive sketches, still unsurpassed. In later years we find a later manner, a different phase of his talent, a different result of his experience; but in 1859 he was already, I repeat, entirely himself, and doing work that is neither strikingly better nor strikingly worse than the work which has followed it a score of years after. In the work of 1859, and in the work of the last period, there will be found about an equal measure of beautiful production. In each there will be something to admire warmly, and something that will leave us indifferent. And in the etchings of 1859, in the very plates that I have mentioned, there is already enough to attest the range of the artist's sympathy with nature and with picturesque effect. *Mytton Hall*, seen or guessed at through the gloom of its weird trees, is remarkable for a certain garden stateliness—a disorder that began in order, a certain dignity of nature in accord with the curious dignity and quietude of Art. The *Egham* subject has the silence of the open country; the *Water*

Meadow is an artist's subject quite as peculiarly, for "the eye that sees" is required most of all when the question is how to find the beautiful in the apparently commonplace.

Next year, amongst other good work, we have the sweet little plate of *Combe Bottom*, which, in a fine impression, more than holds its own against the *Kensington Gardens*, and gives us at least as much enjoyment by its excellence of touch as does the more intricate beauty of the *Shore Mill Pond*, with its foliage so varied and so rich. In the next year to which any etchings are assigned in Sir William Drake's catalogue—a thoroughly systematic book, and done with the aid of much information from the author of the plates—we find Mr. Haden departing from his usual habit of recording his impression of nature, for the object, sometimes not a whit less worthy, of recording his impression of some chosen piece of master's art. This is in the year 1865, and the subject is a rendering of Turner's drawing of the *Grande Chartreuse*, and it is an instance of the noble and artistic translation of work to which a translator may hold himself bound to be faithful. And here is the proper place, I think, to mention the one such other instance of a subject inspired, not by nature, but by the art of Turner, which Seymour Haden's work affords—the large plate of the *Calais Pier*, done in 1874. Nothing shows Mr. Haden's sweep of hand, his masculine command of his means, better than that. Such an exhibition of spontaneous force is altogether refreshing. One or two points about it demand to be noted. In the first place, it makes no pretence, and exhibits no desire, to be a pure copy. Without throwing any imputation on the admirable craft of the pure interpreter and simple reproducer who enables us to enjoy so much of an art that might otherwise never come near to many of us, I may yet safely say that I feel sure that Mr. Haden had never the

faintest intention of performing for the *Calais Pier* this copyist's service. To him the *Calais Pier* of Turner—the sombre earlyish work of the master, now hanging in the National Gallery—was as a real scene. It was not to be scrupulously imitated; what was to be realised, or what was to be suggested, was the impression that it made. With a force of expression peculiar to him, Seymour Haden has succeeded in this aim; but, I think, he has succeeded best in the rare unpublished state which he knows as the “first biting,” and next best in the second state—the first state having some mischief of its own to bear which in the preparatory proofs had not arisen, and in the second state had ceased. The plate is arranged now with a ground for mezzotint—it lies awaiting that work—and if Mr. Haden, having now retraced to the full such steps as may have been at least partially mistaken, is but master of the new method—can but apply the mezzotint with anything of that curious facility and success with which Turner applied it to a few of his plates in *Liber Studiorum*, in which the professional engraver had no part—then we shall have a *chef-d'œuvre* of masculine suggestion which will have been worth waiting for.

To go back to the somewhat earlier plates. The *Penton Hook*, which is one of many wrought in 1864, is another instance—and we have had several already—of the artist's singular power in the suggestion of tree form. Of actual leafage, leafage in detail, he is a less successful interpreter, as is indeed only natural in an etcher devoted on the whole to broad effects, looking resolutely at the *ensemble*. Detail is nothing to him—*ensemble*, balance, is all. But the features of trees, as growth of trunk and bend of bough reveal them, he gives to us as no other contemporary etcher can. And in old Art they are less varied in Claude and in Ruysdael. Mere leafage counted for more with both of these. And if it is too much

to compare Mr. Haden as a draughtsman of the tree with a master of painting so approved as Crome—the painter especially of oak and willow—as an etcher of the tree he may yet be invited to occupy no second place, for Crome’s rare etchings are remarkable for draughtsmanship chiefly. Crome knew little of technical processes in etching, and so no full justice can ever be done to his etched work, which passed, imperfect, out of his own hands, and was then spoilt in the hands of others—dull, friendly people, who fancied they knew more than he did of the trick of the craft, but who knew nothing of the instinct of the art. Crome himself in etching was like a soldier unequipped. Mr. Haden has a whole armoury of weapons.

Seymour Haden has been a fisherman; I do not know whether he has been a sailor. But, at all events, purely rural life and scene, however varied in kind, are discovered to be insufficient, and the foliage of the meadow and the waters of the trout stream are often left for the great sweep of tidal river, the long banks that enclose it, the wide sky that enlivens every great flat land, and by its infinite mobility and immeasurable light gives a soul, I always think, to the scenery of the plain. Then we have *Sunset on the Thames* (1865), *Erith Marshes* (1865), and the *Breaking Up of the Agamemnon* (1870), the last of them striking a deep poetic note—that of our associations with an England of the past that has allowed us the England of to-day—a note struck by Turner in the *Fighting Téméraire*, and struck so magnificently by Browning and by Tennyson¹ in verse for which no Englishman can ever be too thankful.

¹. I mean, of course, in “Home Thoughts from Abroad,” and in the “Revenge: a Ballad of the Fleet.”

In the technique of these later etchings there is, perhaps, no very noticeable departure from that of the earlier but yet mature work. But in composition or disposition of form we seem to see an increasing love of the sense of spaciousness, breadth, potent effect. The work seems, in these best examples, to become more dramatic and more moving. The hand demands occasion for the large exercise of its freedom. These characteristics are very noticeable in the *Sawley Abbey* of 1873. Nor are they absent from our *Dusty Millers*.



Sawley Abbey is etched on zinc, a substance of which Mr. Haden has of late become fond. It affords “a fat line”—a line without rigidity—and so far it is good. But the practical difficulty with it is that the particles of iron it contains make it uncertain and tricky, and we may notice that an etching on zinc is apt to be full of spots and dots. It succeeds admirably, however, where it does not fail

very much. Of course its frequent failure places it out of the range of the pure copyist who copies or translates as matter of business. He cannot afford its risk. In 1877—a year in which Mr. Haden made a number of somewhat undesirable etchings in Spain, and a more welcome group of sketches in Dorsetshire, on the downs and the coast—Mr. Haden worked much upon zinc. And it is in this year that a change that might before have been foreseen is clearly apparent. Dry point before this had been united with etching, but not till now have we much of what is wholly dry point; and from this date the dry-point work is almost, though not altogether, continuous, the artist having rejoiced, he tells me, in its freedom and rapidity.

The Dorsetshire etchings, *Windmill Hill*, *Nine Barrow Down*, and the like, are most of them dry points. In them, though the treatment of delicate distances is not evaded, there is especial opportunity for strong and broad effects of light and shade. Perhaps it is to these that a man travels as his work continues, and as, in continuing, it develops. At least it may be so in landscape.

Here, for the present, is arrested the etched work of an artist thoroughly individual, thoroughly vigorous, but against whom I have charged, by implication, sometimes a lack of exquisiteness, the only too frequent but not inevitable drawback of the quality of force. So much for the work of the hand. For the process of the mind—the character which sets the hand upon the labour, and pricks it on to the execution of the aim—the worst has been said also, when I said, at the beginning, that Mr. Haden lacked that power of extremely prolonged concentration which produced the epic in literature and the epic in painting. These two admissions made, there is little of just criticism of Seymour Haden's work that must not be admiring and cordial—the record of enjoyment rather

than of dissatisfaction—so much faithful and free suggestion does the work contain of the impressions that gave rise to it, so much variety is compassed, so much are we led into unbroken paths, and so much evidence is there of eager desire to enlarge the limits of our Art, whether by plunge into a new theme, or by application of a new process.

CHAPTER II.

JULES JACQUEMART.

THERE died, in September, 1880, at his mother's house in the high road between the Arc de Triomphe and the Bois, a unique artist whose death was for the most part unobserved by the frequenters of picture galleries. He had contributed but little to picture galleries. There had not been given to Jules Jacquemart the pleasure of a very wide notoriety, but in many ways he was happy, in many fortunate. He was fortunate, to begin with, in his birth; for though he was born in the *bourgeoisie*, it was in the cultivated *bourgeoisie*, and it was in the *bourgeoisie* of France. His father, Albert Jacquemart, the known historian of pottery and porcelain, and of ancient and fine furniture, was of course a faithful and diligent lover of beautiful things, so that Jules Jacquemart was reared in a house where little was ugly and much was precious; a house organized, albeit unconsciously, on William Morris's admirable plan, "Have nothing in your home that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful." Thus his own natural sensitiveness, which he had inherited, was highly cultivated from the first. From the first he breathed the liberal and refining air of Art. He was happy in the fact that adequate fortune gave him the liberty, in health, of choosing his work, and in sickness, of taking his rest. With comparatively rare exceptions, he did precisely the things which he was fitted to do, and did them perfectly, and being ill when he had done them, he betook himself to the exquisite South, where colour is, and light—the things we long for the most

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